

**La Télépathie: Recherches Expérimentales** by René Warcollier. Préface by Charles Richet. Paris: Alcan, 1921. 363 pp. (63 figures). Free at <http://books.google.com/books?id=XR5WAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=La+Telepathie:+Recherches+Experimentales+by+Rene+Warcollier>. Nabu, 2010. 394 pp. \$33.75 (paperback). ISBN: 9781142292607.

Before presenting this work, a few words about the author and the context of his writings within the tradition of French psychical research or "métapsychique" (Richet, 1905). Born in 1881 in Ormonville-La-Rogue, on the northwestern coast of France, René Warcollier successfully combined two careers, as a chemical engineer and a "métapsychiste." Well before the creation of the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI), he was in close contact with French psychical researchers and collaborated in the Review *Les Annales des Sciences Psychiques* (founded by Dr. X. Dariex and Professeur C. Richet in 1891). So, he had belonged to the small circle of scholars and scientists who, in 1919, founded the IMI in Paris. While he did not appear in the initial IMI Board, he soon became IMI treasurer and later editor of *La Revue Métapsychique*. From 1946 until 1950, he was IMI's vice-President, and from 1950 up to his death in 1962 he held the position of President.

Warcollier obtained a degree in chemical engineering in 1903, and became a brilliant and prolific inventor as well as head of a major corporation. His patents include the synthetic manufacture of artificial pearls and gemstones (sapphires, emeralds, and rubies), the first super-luminous cinema screen, and an original method for the extraction of potassium permanganate.

It is tempting to see in his early personal and professional interests in light and in the shimmering of colors (in precious stones and in images on a movie screen) the roots of his psychical research, which focused on the characteristics of visual mental imagery implicated in all its forms in telepathic communication. No doubt his attraction to visual impressions may have influenced his psi research and his focus upon cognitive processes, specifically in those underlying telepathic transmission of drawings.

His early colleagues and collaborators were illustrious figures in paranormal research, including Richet, Flammarion, Bozzano, de Vesme, C. Lombroso, Lodge, Maxwell, etc. Most of them were on the editorial committee of *Les Annales des Sciences Psychiques* and published regularly in it, such as Geley (1914) and Osty (1914), the later directors of IMI. Many of them were psychologists or physicians sharing a fascination for human abilities that appeared in association with somnambulism and hypnotism. In such states of consciousness, it was observed that individuals could mobilize and upgrade

resources and reveal psychic capacities inaccessible in the ordinary awakening state. These functions were indeed well-described by Myers (1892, 1903) in his theory of the subliminal self. In addition, *Les Annales des Sciences Psychiques* was echoing the questions of survival and spiritualism (Bozzano, 1906) in line with mainstream SPR researchers.

Both personal psi experiences and intense curiosity contributed to the young Warcollier's strong involvement in psychical research. He wrote his first articles on the subject in *Les Annales des Sciences Psychiques* in 1905 and 1906 (Warcollier, 1905, 1906a, 1906b). Later, he made an analysis of the "fluid motor" device discovered by Count de Tromelin, which consisted of a paper cylinder suspended from its central axis by a needle, so that it is stable but easy to rotate. De Tromelin's experiment supposedly demonstrated that the cylinder could be moved at a distance by a hypothetical "fluid" emanating from human hands. Warcollier's analysis was quite critical of this experiment, arguing that the movement could be attributed to ordinary thermal currents (1908). Three years later, he published an article entitled "Conditions expérimentales dans l'étude de la télépathie" (1911a), in which he critically discusses the theory of Usher and Burt, English researchers who had proposed a physical explanation for telepathy via some sort of waves radiating from the brain.

In fact, Warcollier had serious doubts about all theoretical models of telepathic phenomena, which relied on a supposed physical medium. He claims: "It is best to abandon any theory to deal only with facts and to study successively the experimental conditions."

Another article (Warcollier, 1911b), with reference to Duchâtel's study of psychometric cases, is about 52 psychometric experiments with four psychics that Warcollier co-organized with de Vesme from 1910 to 1911. According to Warcollier, misperceptions are due to contamination by the shape of the object, and the successes are the result of thought transmission. It emphasizes the extremely low number of successes and the considerable amount of errors and inconsistent results from one medium to another. Nevertheless, he sees in psychometry an interesting method to quantify paranormal perception.

His intuition about the importance and function of imagination on our body and mind led him to co-author (with Edmond Duchâtel) *Les Miracles de la Volonté* (Duchâtel & Warcollier, 1912), which presents a number of phenomena intensively studied in the nineteenth century, and still popular in the early twentieth century: auto-suggestion, collective hallucinations, dreams, materializations, thought photography, etc.

As we see, the cultural, theoretical, existential, and experiential background in which Warcollier evolved has three aspects: discoveries about psychology and the unconscious (Myers, Janet, and Freud), a strong passion for spiritualism and the question of survival, and finally a great interest in these



enigmatic phenomena grouped under the name of *métapsychique*. All these subjects were regularly treated in *Les Annales des Sciences Psychiques*.

Because of his fundamental interest in the visual, Warcollier centered his research on the mental image. This fitted well with the ideas of his time and was directly or indirectly linked to the emerging disciplines of the period—including those dealing with the psychology of form and perception, and the psychology of the subconscious and the unconscious.

*La Télépathie* was actually already complete by spring 1914; but with the advent of World War I, Warcollier had to postpone its publication. It finally was published in 1921, two years after the foundation of the IMI. Warcollier writes in his short prologue:

This research was practically entirely conducted in 1914. But, among the ruins of an epoch it seemed anachronistic to me. Those investigations were left behind, when I saw with surprise the public mind coming back to psychical research, even more eager than before the war, as if it distinguished there darkly the moving forces able to elevate Human being in its wholeness.

*La Télépathie* starts with a Preface from Warcollier's friend, Charles Richet, who says: "Here is a book of science, true science. Telepathy, which is one of the core chapters of the *métapsychique*, has been treated (here) very methodically, as a scientific monograph." Amid all other psychical phenomena, Warcollier chooses to present in this volume his long experience of more than ten years research on Telepathy (this word is used by him in its broadest meaning: transmission of sensations, thoughts, ideas, emotions, etc.). This work is dedicated to specific questions, questions that Warcollier intends to be scientific: What is telepathy? What are the mechanisms of transmission from agent to percipient, or from a group of agents to a group of percipients? "Lift every corner of the veil of the Universe . . . discovering in the darkest parts (of the psyche) the key to the enigma . . . exploring the depths of human thought" (p. XIII). These are some of Warcollier's proposals that had a high interest for him.

As a chemical engineer and as a scientist, he focused on the data, and the experimental surroundings under which these phenomena can be obtained, trying in a way to separate the pure telepathic transmission from the "noise ratio," i.e. what prevents a clear reception, by distortions or disturbances of the message. Like any learned man of his time and facing a relatively unexplored field of investigation, he collects the facts, sorts and categorizes them, and finally offers interpretations in which the "subconscious" and neurophysiology held a special place. He does not fail to note like Myers had already noticed (1903) that sleep or drowsiness has a positive role. From this point of view, and surprisingly for an engineer, Warcollier was very aware of contemporary theories of consciousness, perception, and memory.

The book is divided into three big sections and ten chapters.

The first section, devoted to spontaneous telepathy, begins with a review of inquiries on spontaneous telepathy (Chapter 1). Warcollier refers to the numerous cases collected by the SPR in England (reported in the voluminous book *Phantasms of the Living*, 1882) and in France by Camille Flammarion (1914). On the basis of a personal telepathic case (pp. 15–17), as well as the cases published in France and in England, Warcollier objects to the negative conclusions of Vaschide (1908) who discussed and denied the accuracy of some of these results. He then puts forth several conditions favoring the emergence of spontaneous telepathy, according to the percipient's or agent's states of consciousness (sleep or awareness).

In Chapter 2, Warcollier tackles the problem of unintentional telepathic transference. Establishing his argument on the psychological theories of memory of his time (Abramowski, 1914, Bergson, 1919, Janet, 1889), he postulates the unconscious origin of telepathy, noting that it can be expressed not only through words or images, but also through bodily sensations (pain in the heart, throat contractions, etc). Yet, he adds:

To avoid the complication of involving the Intelligence or the subconscious will, admitted by Myers in *Human Personality* (1903), by Geley in *de L'Inconscient au Conscient* (1919), I prefer to accept the temporary hypothesis that the telepathic transmission occurs as light, heat, electro-magnetic waves or sound, in all directions. The section "collective hallucinations" in *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, 1886, 1891) allows admitting this. (pp. 38–39)

According to this model, Warcollier postulates that the psychic waves are produced by brain neurons, even if there is not a specific center of telepathic emission.

He then moves on, in Chapter 3, to a classification of mental images. Agreeing with the English authors (Gurney, 1886, 1891), he notices that in spontaneous telepathy we find more visual than auditory hallucinations (271 vs. 85). Even though clumsily, Warcollier, in these early writings, is already bringing up the probability of a link between unconscious memory and telepathy. He writes:

We must admit, as a starting point, that the images which appear to the mind of the percipient under the form of hallucinations, dreams, or more or less well-formed images, spring exclusively from *his own mind*, from his own conscious or subconscious memory. *There is no carrying of the visual impression from the agent to the percipient*, anymore than there is actual carrying of a letter of the alphabet from the sending apparatus of a telegraph office to the receiving office. The transmission of the message consists in making the same letter of the alphabet *appear*, but it already exists at the receiving apparatus, along with the others, before the transmission takes place. (pp. 46–47, italics in original text)



The deployment of extrasensory messages is thus analogous to the recollection of repressed memories from the depths of memory: Representations and skills unavailable in the ordinary waking states of consciousness re-emerge through a kind of resonance between the telepathic message and memories.

Warcollier then classifies visual imagery according to its relevance and usefulness to spontaneous telepathy; he distinguishes nine types of imagery, ranging from those that are quite frequent for habitual states of consciousness, but of little use for the emergence of telepathic information, to those that are more likely to help the percipient receive a message: dreams, positive or negative illusions, hypnagogic and hypnopompic illusion, hallucinations.

Of course, to contemporary psychologists or parapsychologists this may seem to be obvious, but we must recall that we are talking about ideas developed between 1906 to 1914, by a chemical engineer who had devoted a large part of his life to psychical research.

Following these chapters on spontaneous telepathy, Warcollier analyzes, in some detail, ways to provoke artificial imagery: stimulating the eye mechanically or electrically, utilizing magnets, crystal-gazing, and the action on nerve centers of alkaloids such as mescaline, or peyote (based on the work of Havelock-Ellis, 1898, and Rouhier, 1919).

In Chapter 5 he returns to spontaneous telepathy during the normal sleep state. Based on his own experiences, and experiences of friends and relatives, he seeks to outline differences between dreams that are mistaken as telepathic vs. those that most likely to be genuinely telepathic. Here's an example of one of his wife's telepathic dreams:

One morning, when my mother came into our bedroom, my wife wakes up. She told us the following dream: She saw our housemaid introducing a young man in the house, and this man left the house about 2 a.m. During the day, my mother reminds me of this dream, which impressed her very much. In fact, a neighborhood person had warned her yesterday that the maid had brought a young man home. She never suspected the housemaid to whom we entrust the baby. Very moved by this news, she had been thinking about it all night and was so surprised this morning to hear my spouse telling her dream. We found that the maid had really brought into the house a butcher the previous day. (pp. 116-117)

Curiously, Warcollier concludes this section stating that dreams are "unfit to prove the existence of telepathy" although sleep is seen by him as a good state facilitating the emergence of extrasensory messages.

Starting with Chapter 6, the second section is dedicated to experimental telepathy. It begins with a description of transference and reception of so-called "daily telepathy," when for example two persons concomitantly express the same ideas. Warcollier gives a comprehensive summary of all possible

experimental protocols exploring this kind of telepathy, including playing cards (Richet, 1884), automatic writing, dowsing, lottery balls (Schrenk-Notzing, 1891). Following a detailed analysis of positive and negative results obtained by each of them, he concludes: "Telepathy is not an intellectual power. . . . When intellectual activity is at its height, neurons communicate by contiguity: The lines are busy, according to the expression devoted in telephony" (p. 186). This is no doubt intended as a mere metaphor, rather than neurophysiologic reality, but Warcollier did attach much importance to the parallel between

telephones and "mental radio," as did Sinclair (1930). Like other scientists of his time, he was fascinated and amazed by the technological prowess of the wireless transmission. It is therefore normal that this model compels recognition for everything regarding the transfer of information from one mind to another or from one brain to another brain.

To illustrate telepathy during sleep-onset, he relates his early experiences, in 1906, trying to develop "inner vision" by observing his hypnagogic imagery (Chapter 7). This leads him to suggest how to develop paranormal capacities by relaxing mind and body. Then he makes a statistical and comparative analysis of his own results of seven trials, especially with Mr. Archat as an agent and Warcollier as a percipient. These series include short and long (790 Km) tests, from September 1906 to July 1907 (pp. 192–208).

The third section is devoted to an interpretation of the results. After contrasting his results with those obtained by Usher and Burt (1909) in their investigation of long-distance transmission of card symbols, he examines the different components of telepathic transmission: ideas, sensations, visual or kinesthetic feelings, numbers, concepts, states of mind, moods. He concludes that it is not the representations themselves that are transmitted, but rather the affective states associated with them. He describes characteristics of "positive" drawings, which could be good targets, such as those with contrast and strong feeling. This positive quality is related to the idea of movement and moods, in the drawing, as well as in the personality of the agent. In the same context, representations, which are too abstract, based on numbers, general concepts, and symbols, are considered to inhibit transmission and reception.

For Warcollier the *primum movens* of telepathy is the transmission of sensation and the possibility for the message to enter into resonance with images stored in the percipient's memory. The message sent by the agent emerges in



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the percipient's mind by successive waves, a process which is responsible for message fragmentation. As we said before, Warcollier argues against the hypothesis of direct transmission of the image, through some form of mental projection—viewing this as impossible as the transference of a “pure idea.” He gives far more credence to the hypothesis of resonance, and attempts to illustrate this again by the physical phenomenon of sound waves and radio transmission. He concludes that “only the elements common to the agent and percipient” are transmitted, a bit like the vibrations from a tuning fork will vibrate in resonance to another tune. “No transfer of new knowledge occurs from the agent to the percipient, but rather an awakening, a phenomenon of resonance, vibratory states similar or identical” (p. 288). In this context, distance between agent and percipient does not affect the transmission/reception of telepathy.

Warcollier points very often in this book to similarities and differences between TSF (wireless telegraphy) and radio waves: The latter are clear and direct, but sensitive to distance, while telepathic transmission is less direct, but independent of distance. He tries to analyze, through this approach, the case of Leonie, who was remotely hypnotized by Janet at a distance of two kilometers (in 1893).

Warcollier ends this chapter with reflections about the relationship between mind and matter, and expresses his intuition that the riddle of what is going on between agent and percipient will be resolved at the subatomic level.

In the next chapter, Warcollier summarizes the difficulties that may be encountered in telepathic transmissions. The frequently observed distortions of messages are due to the conditions of the experiment and the flow of free thought association in both the agent's and the percipient's minds.

Warcollier, who had extensive experience with telepathy, was able to pinpoint the conditions of its transmission, conditions opening the psyche of the agent and percipient to the subconscious, thus promoting access to the “subliminal self” of Myers who said that “the telepathic message generally starts from, and generally impinges upon, a subconscious or submerged stratum in both agent and percipient” (Myers, 1903(2):5). Among those facilitating conditions are the role of surprise, the hypnotic state, the focus of attention, the emotional aspect of the message, sympathy between senders and receivers.

Mentioning the works of Abramowski (1898) on paramnesia and Claparède (1903) on free association, Warcollier shows, in the Conclusion, that we find the same difficulties in experimental telepathy as in experimental psychology.

Against a spiritualist interpretation of telepathy, he shows the plausibility and efficiency of a hypothesis that telepathy is a phenomenon occurring between human minds. Speculating about the consequences of telepathy on groups and society, he concludes, in a very lyrical way:

Telepathy is the natural law which we unconsciously obey when we seek to form groups, to assist one another, to join together. We communicate, we do not excommunicate. . . . We are the same man, I am you and you are me. Or to express it in modern terms, we are the electrons of the atom of Humanity. (p. 353)

I hope it is apparent by now that *La Télépathie* is an impressive work, a patient and sustained collection of cases, tests, hypotheses, and analyses, focused on both spontaneous and intentional telepathic phenomena. For the next forty years of his life up until his death in 1962, Warcollier continued his telepathy investigations—confirming, modifying, retracting, developing, improving, and deepening his early and “anticipatory” visions, as expressed in *La Télépathie*. His elaborations on telepathic phenomena, through thousands of trials, contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the process underlying the sending and the receiving of drawings.

Certainly, there were a number of conflicting or contradictory ideas in Warcollier's work: This is understandable, given the richness and complexity of the mechanisms he sought to describe over the course of several decades. But that notwithstanding, *La Télépathie* must be considered as a major precursor to the scientific investigation of this subject. Warcollier succeeded in establishing in this book the foundations for a psychological study of telepathic transmission of drawings. His research contributed to the recognition of telepathy as a clinical reality—so much so that he could propose an entire nosology, thus preparing the way for later researchers, whether scientists or (as he hoped) psychologists.

When he joined IMI in 1919, he naturally continued his investigations. In this Institute during this period between the two wars we find three personalities conducting psychic experiments over long periods of time: Gustave Geley (1919–1924), Eugene Osty (1924–1938), and Rene Warcollier (1921–1962). In the field of qualitative parapsychology, Warcollier rapidly became a figure as eminent as Rhine in the field of quantitative parapsychology. In 1922, after an appeal to 500 persons, he managed to obtain a stable and highly motivated group of 20 persons who agreed to participate in “methodical experimentation.” They met regularly once a week for at least two years, participating in experiments that involved transmission of feelings, printed words, and playing cards, but above all of drawings. Then, Warcollier held a telepathic training group until the end of the 1950s.

During his psychology studies at the University of Colombia, Gardner Murphy (American psychologist and parapsychologist) had heard of Warcollier and his work and groups. In 1923, he decided to take advantage of a Congress of Psychology at Warsaw to meet René Warcollier in Paris. In his obituary of Warcollier, Gardner wrote: “I had the privilege and pleasure to read *La Télépathie*, by Rene Warcollier. It was obviously the important work in the field



of experimental studies in telepathy" (1962). Their meeting was the beginning of a great friendship and long collaboration, through transatlantic telepathic experiments between New York and Paris. Thanks to Murphy, a part of *La Télépathie* and some articles (of the 56 published by Warcollier in *La Revue Métapsychique* between 1924 and 1962), were made available for the English-speaking world (Gardner, 1938, 1948, Warcollier, 1938, 1948).

He was also ahead of his time by situating telepathy within a functional model of memory, a model some parapsychologists use today to explain the ESP process (Irwin, 1979, Roll, 1966). Warcollier postulated a resonance between the message sent and subconscious information in the mind of the percipient. This hypothesis introduced some difficulties for Warcollier, in the way he dealt with telepathic information and the role of feelings and emotions. It seems obvious today that strong affect has an impact on the transmission, which allows or distorts the contents of the message; Warcollier wanted to underestimate the role of affect in this dynamic of sending/receiving, devoting his attention to more "controllable" aspects, such as color, movement, contrast, etc. Indeed, the use of drawings in telepathic sessions generally allowed him to keep strong emotions at a distance.

Very soon in his career as a metapsychiste, his experimental method and what he found made Warcollier a pioneer who opened the way to further discoveries: His own he recounted in *La Revue Métapsychique*, as well as those of other parapsychologists. Some researchers today consider him as the *true father* of remote viewing, which owes many, if not most, of its techniques to his work, but also to others (Targ & Harary, 1984, Targ & Katra, 2001, Swann, 2001). Regarding the nature of the telepathic transmission (its essence, its substratum, or its *motus operandi*), Warcollier can only offer speculative assumptions. He was however an astute observer and has demonstrated a great relevance in the study of the emergence and deployment of message in the percipient mind and drawings. Similarly he could point out the conditions for this emergence and deployment and show the similarities between telepathy functioning and the psychology of perception.

In France, following Warcollier's work, Henri Marcotte (1977) has facilitated training groups in telepathy. Instead of drawings, Marcotte proposed stories and scenarios, introducing the time dimension. In parallel, he refined the techniques of transmission and reception. Following him, I went further by introducing in the group telepathic training (Si Ahmed, 1990, 2006), a psychoanalytic understanding of the dynamics and the processes involved in sending and receiving messages.

To end this review, I would like to quote Eileen Garrett: Warcollier "had never wavered from his preferred area of research, and current trends indicate a re-examination of the work in which he had been a pioneer" (1962).

DJOHAR SI AHMED

Psychoanalyst, Holotropic Breathworker  
ICLP, 15 rue Bague, 75015 Paris, France  
djoharsiahmed@orange.fr

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### Further Books of Note

**The Altenberg 16: An Exposé of the Evolution Industry** by Suzan Mazur. Scoop Media (New Zealand), 2009; North Atlantic Books, 2010. 343 pp. \$25 (paperback). ISBN 9781556439247.

This is a profoundly disappointing book. Its genesis is an article of March 2008 (which forms Chapter 2 of this book) breaking the news of an impending meeting of “16 biologists and philosophers of rock star stature—let’s call them ‘the Altenberg 16’—who recognize that the theory of evolution which most practicing biologists accept . . . is inadequate in explaining our existence.”

That promised much, and when this followup book was announced I was eager to read it. Unfortunately, the book doesn’t deliver on the article’s promise. As a result, the author really has nothing useful to add to the article, and the book is replete with expressions of resentment that she was not invited to the actual meeting. Apart from the reprinted article, the book consists of interviews

### THE ALTENBERG 16: AN EXPOSÉ OF THE EVOLUTION INDUSTRY

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ROBERT J. SHAPIRO  
MICHAEL BEHE  
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